



**IN SEARCH OF A BETTER PATH:  
TUNISIAN CITIZENS EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS ON THE  
PARLIAMENT, UPCOMING ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL  
PARTIES  
(Conducted April 25 to May 2, 2019)**

National Democratic Institute

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**TUNISIA**

- ⊙ National capital
- ⊙ Governorate capital
- Town, village
- ✈ Major airport
- International boundary
- - - Regional boundary





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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	6
Map of Tunisia	7
Executive Summary	8
Principal Findings	17
The National Direction	17
Parliament	21
Legislative and Presidential Elections	30
Legislative elections	31
Presidential elections	33
ISIE and electoral observers	35
Political parties	36
Municipal councils	39
ANNEX A: Participant Demographics	41
ANNEX B: STUDY METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT	42

## Preface

After having been postponed on many occasions for technical and political reasons, Tunisia held municipal elections May 6, 2018. More than 53,000 candidates, representing 2,074 lists all over the country, ran for seats on municipal councils. Municipal elections represented an important landmark for the implementation of Article Seven of the Tunisian Constitution. As a result, the national government has begun to delegate power and responsibilities to the municipal councils, in a process of decentralization that will last for many years.

Nearly a year removed from the municipal elections, Tunisians of all political persuasions and all different walks of life regard their government with disillusionment and cynicism. In light of a poor economy and perceptions of political deadlock, voters are frustrated and their trust in politicians and the Parliament is running thin. Tunisians are looking for genuine achievements which could have a positive and direct impact on their daily life. Many have lost all interest in what they see as pointless politicking, but many others are asking for more direct contact with their political leaders. Confronted by a lack of concrete achievements by their government, citizens could use the forthcoming elections to vent their frustrations, either through a decision to boycott the elections altogether, or by casting a vote for dramatic change to the national political landscape.

Beyond their significance as a milestone of democratic transition, the municipal elections also highlighted new trends in Tunisian politics. In its final report, the Tunisian *Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections* (the ISIE, or Independent Higher Authority for Elections in English) confirmed that more votes were cast for independent lists of candidates than for any political party (32.2% overall). Historic gains were also observed for women and young candidates, with 47.5% and 37.2% of the vote, respectively. However, the same elections were also characterized by an unprecedented level of abstention; the participation rate amounted to 33.7% of registered voters and represents about half of the turnout for 2014 and the Constituent Assembly elections of 2011.

Within a few months, Tunisia will witness another round of historic elections. On October 6, 2019, Tunisian voters will head to the polls to elect the next People's Representatives Assembly (PRA). They will cast their ballots again four weeks later, on Sunday, November 17, to elect the President of the Republic.

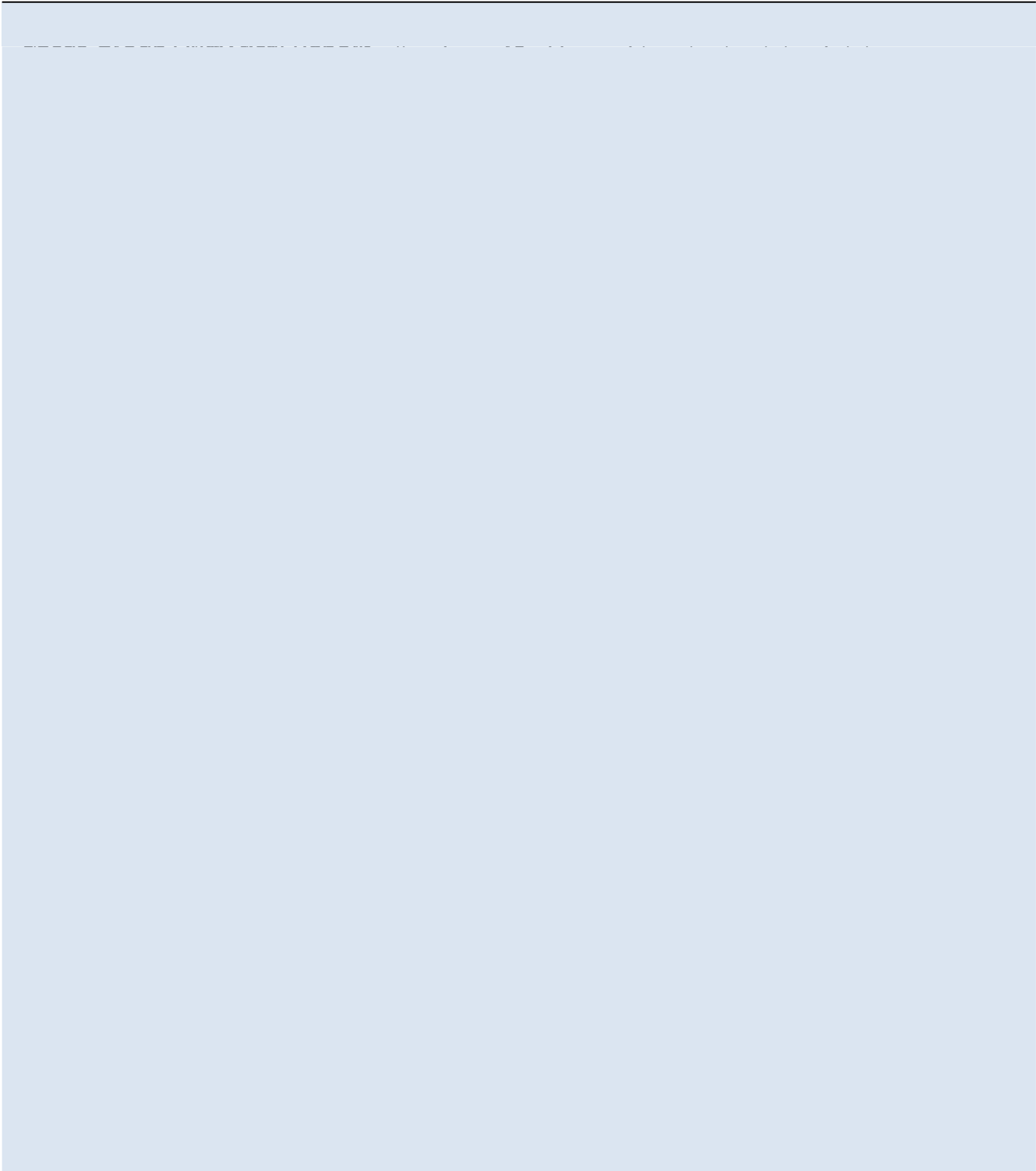
In the focus group discussions recently convened by NDI, nearly all participants expressed a desire to turn the page on the current political moment. They wished to see more accountable political leaders, and more responsive institutions working to address the many structural challenges facing Tunisia today. In a departure from the recent past, many participants expressed nostalgia for the years before the democratic transition. While none openly wished for the return of authoritarian rule, they lamented the failure of the transition to achieve their desired goals, and were circumspect in their assessment of recent gains in freedom. With views ranging from near-total disillusionment to cautious optimism, Tunisians are longing for bold, effective leadership to deliver on the promises of the revolution.

# Map of Tunisia

The locations for this wave of focus group discussions are indicated on the map below by an X.



# Executive Summary





opinions deriving from these events. The most notable of these events is the resumption of normal broadcasting by Nessma TV on May 3.

## Focus Group Analytical Report

## NATIONAL DIRECTION

- There was a near-consensus that Tunisia is going in the wrong direction. Participants agreed unanimously that almost **nothing is going well nowadays.**
- **Freedom of expression** was the **sole positive** mentioned, although it was qualified by some who feel it has been misused.
- The participants identified **unemployment, the high cost of living, and the decrease of investments** as the principal problems in present-day Tunisia.
- Poor outcomes in **education** and **healthcare services**, as well as **insecurity**, were also mentioned by numerous participants.
- Participants also described an **increase in moral problems**, such as **disrespectful behavior, lack of personal responsibility, and diminishing consideration for the well-being of others.**

## CURRENT PARLIAMENT

- A minority of people in each focus group were familiar with their MPs and their political affiliations.
- The participants expressed **disappointment** and **frustration** when asked to recall any accomplishments of the Parliament as a whole, or their MPs individually, over the past five years. With regards to the three major roles the Parliament is supposed to play – representation, legislation, and oversight – participants noted the following:
  - The majority agreed that their **MPs do not represent them**, neither at the regional level nor at the national level. Many participants said their MPs are only looking for more power to serve their own interests and the interests of their political parties.
  - A few participants were aware of the recently adopted acts or draft laws being discussed in the Parliament. A general feeling prevailed that **new legislation does not deal with the priority issues of most citizens.** Participants noted some new laws that were more relevant to people's ordinary lives in principle, but denounced a **lack of implementation.**
  - Most participants were fully aware of the Parliament's role in oversight of the government, but considered the current Parliament has not played this role to its full extent, citing a **lack of results** from Parliamentary interrogations.

Focus Group Analytical Report

- A minority of participants in each focus group stated that they closely follow debates in the Parliament's plenary sessions. Most participants said they had watched some of the televised sessions. The majority complained that the **debates were incomprehensible and produced no tangible results**. They were also upset by a perceived **lack of respect among MPs** and the **high rate of absenteeism**.

- Regarding parliamentary commissions, participants were not always aware of their work. When the different commissions were explained, participants said they could play an important role if their members were competent in their subject matter. Some participants stated that the decisions taken inside the commissions are mostly determined by the ideology of the leading political parties, and this can impede the smooth processing of commission decisions.
- A small number of men only were familiar with the Consensus Committee. While they acknowledged some potential for the committee to facilitate decision-making, participants also decried the committee's lack of transparency, and noted that it could be dominated by self-interested agendas.
- All participants expressed **anger with the behavior of the MPs** in the Parliament, which they described as **unbecoming** and **disrespectful** of their duty to represent the people of Tunisia and help the country progress.
- Most of the participants agreed that **the decision-making process is very slow and lacks transparency**. According to them, some MPs are deliberately impeding laws that are against their personal interests or those of their political parties (including, for instance, the Constitutional Court). They added that some MPs are not qualified to rule on issues dealt with in the discussions.
- Almost all participants believed that the Parliament is dominated by the blocs of Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha, the two largest parties. Most participants agreed that smaller blocs have little or no role in decision-making.
- Participants unanimously denounced MPs who have switched political parties, a phenomenon they described as **political tourism**. In addition to the confusion of identifying parliamentary blocs and the political stances of their representatives, participants remarked that they had voted for parties, not individual candidates, and felt betrayed when MPs switched parties without consulting their voters.
- Social networks (**notably YouTube and Facebook**) constitute the biggest

**sources of news and information** for most of the participants (especially youth). Social media was preferred by most as an efficient means to get news all day, and to interact with community members.

Focus Group Analytical Report they have visited the web page or the official Facebook page of the Parliament.

- **Television** was mentioned as an important news resource for participants, though with the noted drawback that it provides only minimal opportunities for interaction with public officials and ordinary people.
- Almost no participants indicated making any effort to seek out information about the Parliament. **Some participants reported directly contacting MPs**, mostly for personal reasons, to obtain private services, or to voice their opinion on draft laws under consideration at the Parliament.

#### NEXT PARLIAMENT

- Participants shared **divided expectations for the next Parliament**: while some were pessimistic and openly doubted the chance for any positive change, other participants believed the new Parliament should improve, based on experience, increased citizen awareness, and increased public pressure to perform. Some also believed that political parties are determined to exert a tighter control on each other to achieve better results and win back popular confidence.
- With regards to the new Parliament, participants gave priority to the following:
  - *Inflation, the rising cost of living, and the devaluation of the Tunisian dinar*
  - *Healthcare*
  - *Investment, job creation, national wealth, and development of the agricultural sector*
  - *Education*
  - *Infrastructure and public transportation*
  - *Tourism*
- With regards to the **work methods** of the new Parliament, participants would like to see the following:
  - *Respect and implementation of the laws*
  - *Require attendance of plenary sessions*

- “Genuine” and “decisive” action against corruption
- A clear action plan for the development of the country
- To increase **citizens’ confidence in Parliament**, the participants stated that in addition to the above items, parliamentarians should **contact the citizens directly** and **identify their needs** for a better decision-making process.
- All participants said they would appreciate **more direct and interactive communication with MPs**, rather than receiving printed documents and leaflets to be updated about their political and electoral programs.
- To improve grassroots communication and afford more citizens the opportunity to interact with MPs, the participants proposed the following:
  - *Set up constituency offices all over the Tunisian territory*
  - *Hold regional outreach programs or site visits to listen to queries*
  - *Increased presence and activity on social networks*
- Most of the participants reiterated their readiness to be more involved in the new Parliament if the new MPs show improved efforts and increase outreach.

## LEGISLATIVE AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

- Almost all participants were aware of the legislative and presidential elections to be held in October and November 2019, but Many did not know the exact date of these elections.
- Most of the respondents declared their **intention to vote** in upcoming elections, describing the vote as both their **right** and as a **civic duty** to Tunisia. A few participants elaborated that they intend to cast their ballot in the hope of appointing new leaders who will be able to change the situation in the country. Yet others described their intention in adverse terms, saying they would vote only to ensure their ballots are not used for electoral fraud.
- Participants were divided over the credibility of the next elections: some said they expected the **next elections to be fair and transparent**. This group said that Tunisian citizens nowadays are better informed and competent to hold their government accountable, and therefore could detect and resist any electoral interference. The remaining participants held that **elections will never be fair and transparent**, given the events that the country has witnessed recently, notably the closure of Nessma TV.
- All participants acknowledged a **risk of unrest** and violence among political

parties during the electoral campaign and on election day.

- According to participants, the **National Army** is the first guarantor of security for the elections and to ensure democratic elections, followed by the Focus Group Analytical Report. Some other participants mentioned the ISIE, and both domestic and foreign observation missions.

#### *Legislative elections*

- When asked to describe their ideal profile of an MP, participants frequently mentioned the following:
  - *Someone who is close to the people, and always ready to listen to constituents*
  - *A sincere, honest and patriotic person*
  - *A ferocious defender of citizens*
  - *An outspoken and persuasive person*
  - *Aged between 35 and 50 years*
- In order to keep informed about political developments, participants preferred **direct interaction** with MPs, including **regular meetings** in the various regions and in public spaces such as cultural centers, youth centers, constituent offices, and public forums.
- The participants chose the following legislative priorities for the next parliament:
  - *Grow the national economy*
  - *Keep inflation under control (to stop the rise in prices, notably of food commodities)*
  - *Reduce unemployment*
  - *Ensure security*
  - *Undertake reforms in the education sector*
  - *Undertake reforms in the health sector*

Additional priorities were specific to certain locations:

Tunis

Nabeul

Jendouba

Tozeur

- Sanitation	- Infrastructure (e.g. asphaltting of roads, rainwater Management)	- Fresh water supply and sanitation services in rural areas - Construction and maintenance of rural roads - Upgrading tourist facilities	- Upgrading of the tourist sector
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### Presidential elections

- Participants defined the ideal profile of the next Tunisian president as follows:
  - *Strong personality and independent (some likened these traits to former President Ben Ali)*
  - *patriotic*
  - *charismatic*
  - *close to citizens (for most of the participants like former president Habib Bourguiba)*
  - *diplomatic*
  - *aged between 40 and 60 years*
  - *strong performance in live discussions and debates, for example with rival candidates*
- Participant priorities for the next President of the Republic included:
  - *Rebuild the good image of Tunisia overseas*
  - *Propose concrete and tangible political programs*
  - *Have a record of past achievements ("a good CV")*
  - *Full disclosure of personal assets*
  - *Advocate a sincere and down-to-earth discourse*
  - *To have a better idea about the presidential candidates and their political programs, the participants preferred **direct contact** with the candidate (through visits to the various regions in the country, for example).*

### ISIE AND ELECTORAL OBSERVERS

- Most of the participants were familiar with ISIE, but opinions were mixed regarding its trustworthiness. This is due to various reasons:
  - Because its membership is appointed by the Parliament, some participants doubted the ISIE's political neutrality.
  - Others expressed concerns over the resignation of several ISIE

members, saying that this lack of stability illustrated the weakness of this institution.

Focus Group Analytical Report

- Some participants lamented that the ISIE was not doing enough to ensure fair and impartial elections, referring to vote-buying and other undue attempts to influence recent elections by political parties.

- Most of the participants agreed that the ISIE has performed well its function of registering voters, and noted that its performance has improved compared to previous elections. For some participants, the ISIE can still do a better job of **outreach and registering elderly and illiterate voters**.
- Participants believed that **election observers** – both domestic and international – play an important role in assuring a **climate of trust, security, and credibility of the elections**. However, some participants incorrectly described observers as working for specific political parties.
- The perception of foreign election observers was somewhat mixed. Some participants noted their role in **boosting trust in the electoral process and the results of the elections**, in addition to the possibility of **improving democratic practices** through their recommendations. But other participants said observers could be involved in efforts to influence the elections. However, most participants said foreign observers play **no significant role**, positive or negative.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

- Participants fell into two general camps when asked to evaluate political parties:
  - Some participants were unhappy with the current plethora of political parties, feeling that there are **too Many parties to follow** and understand properly.
  - The remaining participants favored the multi-party system, noting that **more parties should mean more competition for voters**, an incentive to optimize their programs and provide useful services for citizens.
- All participants viewed the phenomenon of **political tourism** unfavorably. Participants commented that because they initially elected representatives for their ideology and their political programs, they were incensed by elected officials who changed parties. Some felt that this shifts in allegiance showed the voters have wasted their time and energy, and their opinions are not valued by their elected leaders.



## Focus Group Analytical Report

- When asked their impressions of the new political parties that have formed this year, most of the participants agreed that new parties will not bring anything different compared to the existing ones. Most explained this opinion by saying they had **lost trust in all political parties**. They saw new parties as re-shuffling of the same activists, who had already failed to deliver on needed reforms. Others were skeptical that any other political party could break the duopoly held by Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes.
- Some participants expressed optimism that new parties could flourish as long as they are ready to serve the public interest and manage to obtain a grassroots constituency. They noted that newly-established political parties are in a good position to learn lessons from the current politicians and they are already fully aware of the demands of the populace.
- Almost all the participants agreed that the **political parties never involve ordinary citizens** in the preparation of their political programs, and that they are only contacted during electoral campaigns.
- In order to better engage citizens in the electoral programs of the political parties and to better address their priorities, the participants suggested:
  - To **set up coordination committees** in every region to identify local needs and problems
  - To **carry out pre-scheduled visits** to the different regions and set up **discussion groups** to interact with the citizens and develop an electoral agenda.
- Participants described contrasting roles for political opposition:
  - Constructive opposition, in which the opposition parties hold the majority coalition accountable and provide alternative accounts of government programs and policy decisions where applicable. The opposition in this role ensures that citizens receive full information about the government's performance.
  - Desultory opposition, considered to be reflexively opposed to any majority initiative regardless of its merits, and unable or uninterested in proposing solutions. Participants who took this view described the opposition parties as self-interested and untrustworthy. Most participants appeared to favor this view.

## **POLITICAL PARTIES AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL**

- For most of the participants, the political landscape at the regional level is **identical** to the national.

- No participants had observed any activity by newly established political parties in the regional political landscape.

## MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

### Focus Group Analytical Report

- Participants were **frequently unsatisfied** with the functioning of municipal councils, pointing to the **lack of financial resources, inadequate facilities, and lack of human resources**. Some charged that their local councilors were incompetent.
- When thinking about their own local councils, **some participants noted improvements** in their neighborhoods. In these cases, participants frequently mentioned that local residents are fully committed to assisting the municipality.
- When asked what improvements they had noticed in their neighborhoods, participants mentioned:
  - **Improved sanitation** in general, including the cleaning of streets and the collection of garbage
  - The construction and repair of the **roads**
  - The **regulation of local markets** and the removal of illegal street vendors
- Only a few participants were fully aware of the concept of **participatory democracy**. Many of these had been involved in some local activism and recalled positive experiences.
- Some participants were aware of participatory democracy but explained that they had not personally gotten involved: some said that they did not have enough time, or did not believe their participation would matter, while others said they did not know how to engage with municipal councils.
- Still, almost all participants **expressed interest in the approach of participatory democracy** and their ability to have a say in their local governance.

## Principal Findings

This study presents the evaluations of Tunisian citizens about the current situation of the country, five years after the election of a new President and Parliament, and nine years after the revolution. ~~Focus Group Analytical Report~~ Discussion groups, including 120 participants, from four different regions of Tunisia, from late April through early May 2019. The findings, drawn from analysis of participants' statements, are detailed below.

### The National Direction

The participants were nearly unanimous in the sentiment that the country is going in the wrong direction. When invited to mention some positive aspects, the only thing that received multiple mentions was the gain in freedom of expression.

#### Positive observations

Participants were asked to name anything that they believed was going well in Tunisia. As in prior waves of NDI focus group discussions, participants focused only on negative aspects of the current moment, unless prompted to think of positive achievements. Among the few positive aspects mentioned by the participants, the **freedom of expression** was the most commonly mentioned topic.

*"The positive aspect here is that we can speak our minds and give our opinions: in other words we can have the freedom of expression even though sometimes it is being misused by some people and in the media as well ..."* (Male, 27, student, Tunis)

*"The only good thing we can talk about here is the freedom of expression in the media and in politics, even though this kind of freedom is being misused nowadays..."* (Female, 52, housewife, Jendouba)

*"The only good thing that could be stressed here is that everybody could speak freely."* (Female, 37, secretary, Tozeur)

*"There is only the freedom of expression..."* (Male, 40, professor, Tozeur)

Even while acknowledging the benefits of greater freedom of expression, participants were not entirely satisfied with the way it is currently practiced in Tunisia:

*"With regards to the freedom of expression, it could be acceptable in some cases because there are limits to abide by. Unfortunately, we can see people use this concept to hurt others, and therefore, we cannot talk about the positive side of the freedom of expression here."* (Male, 49, artisan, Nabeul)

*"When we talk about freedom, we always mean the freedom of expression. Yet, the good politicians, who accept to interact with the others, are often ill-treated or kicked out of the country, or even assassinated."* (Female, 22, student, Nabeul)

*"The problem is that people go too far when using the freedom of expression"* (Male, 67, retired, Tozeur)

Following the initial decision to close Nessma TV, participants expressed fear that the government could launch a broader crackdown on media in general.

**Focus Group Analytical Report**  
*"It is not only Nessma TV station. If they really think that there is something wrong there, they could shut down the other stations too!" (Male, 49, civil servant, Tozeur)*

Some other positive aspects were mentioned, including:

- The strengthening of civil society
- The restructuring of state-run institutions
- The development of an independent media
- The fight against corruption
- The development of charity associations

### **Negative observations**

Participants were more forthcoming when asked to name things that are not going well in Tunisia today. In every focus group, participants mentioned multiple issues that they perceived negatively. In contrast with positive developments, these issues were often directly linked to their community or household.

Economic challenges were most frequently cited, notably **unemployment, increasing prices, and the high cost of living**, in addition to **decreasing foreign investment**. These grievances were named by all participants no matter their own personal socioeconomic status. From the unemployed to well-compensated professionals, complaints about the bad economy and especially diminished purchasing power were universal. In some participants' view, these economic trends are the latest in a progressive weakening of the middle class in Tunisia; some remarked that society is increasingly comprised of only extremely rich or extremely poor classes.

*"Nowadays, the citizen cannot make both ends meet anymore and prices have increased considerably. Now, you can only see two social categories: the rich people who enjoy a fixed revenue and earn good money, and the poor who work as casual laborers and spend all their income on the same day." (Female, 23, worker, Jendouba)*

*"Nowadays, only the rich can lead a decent life in Tunisia." (Male, 24, upholsterer, Tunis)*

*"The civil servants do not earn enough, and their salaries are too low to take care of their families. I am retired and we only get 40% of our former salary, and this is not enough with the current high cost of living." (Male, 69, retired, Jendouba)*

Concerns related to **education** and **healthcare** were the next most commonly mentioned. With regards to education, participants in all groups expressed concern over the quality of public education, teacher strikes, drug consumption by teenagers in schools, and fears of sexual molestation. In the health sector, many participants had been negatively affected by a lack of access to healthcare services, lack of treatments and medications, and corruption in healthcare administration.

*"Education quality has deteriorated in Tunisia. They [teachers] have been going on strike for the whole year, and instead of going to school, the pupils end up in the street where they face many dangers: drugs, alcohol etc. ..."* **(Female, 22, student, Jendouba)**

### **Focus Group Analytical Report**

*"The health sector has equally deteriorated. The newborns who died at the Rabta Hospital, due to serum contamination, are an illustrative case in point. Today in Tunisia, if you are not well off enough to go to private clinics, you end up dead: in hospital, there are no basic medications... you queue up for endless hours, and then you are informed that the medications you need are not available."* **(Female, 23, worker, Jendouba)**

*"Healthcare is so poor, when patients are dying in hospital."* **(Female, 21, student, Tunis)**

In almost all discussion groups, the participants stressed the **problems of insecurity and rising crime**.

*"There is no more security in the country. We see crime everywhere!"* **(Female, 45, homemaker, Tunis)**

*"Lack of security leads straight to terrorism"* **(Male, 40, teacher, Tozeur)**

Although most problems noted by the participants were related to the economy, politics, and public services, **social and moral problems** comprised another broad category. In each region, some members of every group discussed a degradation of public morality, such as a lack of respect or personal responsibility.

*"With regards to culture, Tunisia is going backwards. There are three values that are losing momentum nowadays: work, ethics, and helping others. None of these values is respected now."* **(Male, 52, inspector at the Ministry of Education, Jendouba)**

*"The young people want everything fast, without work. "* **(Female, 52, inspector, Tozeur)**

*"People are not conscious, they want to take things by force. "* **(Female, 35, unemployed, Tozeur)**

*"People are too selfish, no one worries about others. "* **(Male, 27, personal trainer, Tunis)**

Some problems were mentioned more frequently by certain groups.

**Youth** participants were more critical of recent reforms, on the basis that new legislation was irrelevant to the problems of ordinary citizens. Youth were also more concerned about the problems of unemployment and the legal/financial barriers to starting a new business. Youth were also more likely to state that they did not expect the government to provide jobs or other solutions for them. Youth mentioned immigration as an attractive option, even if it was done illegally.

*"I do not trust anybody. I only live for my family and my friends. I do not take any interest in Tunisia as a country anymore. It did not give me anything. I really want to emigrate, and I am seriously thinking about it!"* **(Male, 24, upholsterer, Tunis)**

*"I left school to work in the army and earn money. At least, I can get a salary and I can have a loan. If Had remained at school, I would have never been able to do anything!" (Female, 21, vocational training, Tunis)*

### **Focus Group Analytical Report**

*"In the past, we could afford to be optimistic, to be hopeful! We want to work. Now, this is no longer the case!" (Male, 32, nurse, Jendouba)*

*"The young do not think about their professional career, the only thing they can do is continue school." (Female, 23, Intern, Tunis)*

**Women** participants often assigned higher priority to healthcare services, education, and insecurity, whereas men focused more on the economy and governance.

A number of other problems were mentioned less frequently, including:

- Smuggling
- Decaying infrastructure and the lack of adequate transportation
- Exploitation of natural resources by foreign companies
- Decline of the agricultural sector
- Poor working conditions of agricultural laborers, especially women
- Disrespect of the security forces
- The "brain drain," loss of skilled workers to emigration
- The lack of rule of law

## Parliament

After having discussing the national situation, participants offered their evaluations of the current Parliament's performance, as it approaches the end its five-year mandate. Participants were asked to evaluate the Parliament along three different dimensions: representation of the people, passing laws, and government oversight.

Discussion questions measured the participants' awareness of the Parliament, their local MPs, and the parliamentary committees. Most participants were not highly-informed of the Parliament; in each focus group, a few participants recalled the names of the MPs in their respective regions, and their party affiliations. Only a few participants were familiar with the various parliamentary committees.

Asked to evaluate the performance of the Parliament over the past five years, most participants expressed strongly negative impressions and disappointment with their personal MPs and the Parliament in general.

### Representation of the People

Most participants agreed that **their deputies in Parliament do not represent them**, neither at the regional nor at the national level. Participants often explained this in terms of self-interest, saying that their MPs are only looking for power to serve personal and parochial interests.

*"They do not represent the people at all, why is that? Because if they represented the citizen in a proper manner, and in a fully professional manner, they would at least be aware the citizens' problems, the prices of the basic commodities. On TV they asked some MPs the price of a liter of cooking oil and a kilo of sugar, they could not give any answer simply because they do not know. How can they pretend to represent the people if they do not know their problems? ...In short, they are only looking out for their own interests and it is the people who pay the price for this carelessness!" (Male, 49, laborer, Nabeul)*

*"They only came to Parliament to serve their own interests and those of their political parties."*  
**(Male, 53, laborer, Tunis)**

*"In my opinion, they are not competent enough to represent the citizen, because citizens now are demonstrating fighting for their rights alone."* **(Female, 23, intern, Nabeul)**

*"I haven't seen our deputies defending our case. Sometimes they talk about the problems in their regions, but not all."* **(Female, 58, nurse, Tozeur)**

Often participants complained about "political tourism," when candidates for whom they voted have changed parties. Political tourism was an important reason many participants cited to explain why they felt MPs did not represent them. Because they had voted for a specific political party, on the basis of that party's specific agenda, they viewed elected MPs' switching parties as a contrary to their duty represent the voters.

*"Political tourism is a betrayal! The people have voted for an MP because he belongs to a*

*political party and when he changes his political affiliation, some new political interests will emerge and alter the whole scenario. Yet, this is sheer betrayal. In this case, what shall the citizen, who had voted for that candidate, do? ” (Male, 29, personal trainer, Nabeul)*

*“They should stop changing from one party to another, because when we elected them we chose them for their party and a specific political program.” (Male, 57, farmer, Tozeur)*

### **Focus Group Analytical Report**

*“The Parliament does not deal with people's reality. Each one of the MPs lives on another planet. The only thing the MPs are doing is to change from one political party to another, just as if they were changing football teams. There is no coherence among them. ” (Male, 38, unemployed, Jendouba)*

Some participants noted there are some MPs who are more effective in representing ordinary citizens, because they talk about everyday problems like the rising cost of living, the crisis in the health sector, and education, among others. However, even these participants stated that no MPs have come up with concrete solutions to help out citizens.

*“Yes, they talk about high prices and people's needs but never act to change this situation.” (Woman, 35, unemployed, Tunis)*

### **Ratification of laws**

Groups were able to name a number of new laws and current draft laws under consideration by the Parliament. Respondents mentioned the following (the names of the laws are listed in terms used by the participants, rather than official designation) :

- Personal inheritance law
- Abolition of capital punishment
- Decriminalization of homosexuality
- Increasing the official retirement age
- Law on violence against women
- Law on drugs
- Finance law

Across all groups, participants agreed that these developments **do not address important priorities for most citizens**. Even in cases where legislation was considered important, participants complained that new laws were lacking effective implementation.

*“There are important laws that have not yet been raised, and they are doing this deliberately because changing [the laws] does not serve their interests, such as the law on the penal code and the constitutional court.” (Male, 62, retired, Jendouba)*

Among those participants who were most aware of new legislation, there was still confusion over whether new laws had gone into effect. The slow pace of decision-making and a lack transparency were both cited as reasons for this confusion.

*“There are some laws which were discussed but not ratified, why is that? I am not sure. Since the procedures are so lengthy, we could lose the information altogether.” (Male, 53, worker, Tunis)*



*"Already to review an article of the constitution, it takes four months, in addition to quarrels and problems..." (Male, 35, artisan, Nabeul)*

*"They [MPs] are always absent; they do not attend the parliamentary sessions." (Female, 48, entrepreneur, Tunis)*

*"Sometimes we watch the debates in the Parliament, but we do not understand anything." (Female, 66, homemaker, Tozeur)*

## **Government Oversight**

Most participants understood Parliament's role monitoring government, and took its performance in oversight into account when offering their general evaluation of Parliament's performance. Indeed, participants in all groups recalled the public questioning of government ministers in Parliament. However, when asked specifically about parliamentary oversight, most participants considered the current Parliament to be underperforming. Besides questioning ministers, participants were unaware of any other measures the Parliament had undertaken in government oversight. In spite of some positive impressions, most participants agreed that **parliamentary oversight has not produced meaningful results**.

*"There is monitoring of the government, and I remember the recent questioning of the Minister of Education. The event was marked by a lack of respect, and even insults, but without achieving any concrete and tangible results." (Male, 49, business manager, Tunis)*

*"They are only interested in fighting and being aggressive to protect their own interests." (Female, 55, housewife, Tozeur)*

*"Even though they are interrogating ministers, nothing has changed. There is no follow-up, they never learn from their previous errors and nobody is held accountable for his actions." (Female, 32, unemployed, Tozeur)*

*"People in the Parliament are just ridiculous. They are never serious when it comes to enquiries and they never ensure the follow-up of their decisions." (Male, 35, artisan, Nabeul)*

*"There is a difference between interrogation and punishment. In the Parliament, there are interrogations but no punishment." (Male, 45, civil servant, Tunis)*

## **Plenary sessions**

While the plenary session is a critical part of the parliamentary process, Many participants who watched plenary sessions on television declared that they could not understand what laws were being discussed, nor could they follow the debates between parliamentarians, which they described as overly long. Participants also complained about a lack of respect and absenteeism they observed while watching plenary sessions. Misbehavior was a favorite explanation for the Parliament's failure to produce a genuine action plan. Many respondents reported that they gave up watching plenary sessions for these reasons.

*"What I remember from these sessions is that they love fighting amongst themselves." (Female, 58, nurse, Tozeur)*

*"When I watch the debates, it reminds me of a comedy or a play, where they are producing a performance, but there is no action." (Male, 62, civil servant, Tozeur)*

**Focus Group Analytical Report**

*"I cannot remember anything because I only saw fighting." (Female, 21, intern, Tunis)*

## Parliamentary committees

When asked to gauge their awareness of parliamentary committees, participants mentioned the following:

### Focus Group Analytical Report

- Committee to fight corruption
- Committee on women's and children's affairs
- Committee on individual liberties and equality
- Finance committee
- Energy committee
- Committee on security
- Committee to investigate jihadist networks.

Some participants described these committees as being highly important, provided their membership is competent to handle the matters they are entrusted with in each committee. There are some participants who stated that given the dominance of some political parties (holding the highest number of seats in the Parliament), the decisions taken by these committees follow partisan lines.

While most groups had at least a few participants who were aware of the parliamentary committees, a substantial minority said they were unaware of any committees. No members of the Tunis youth discussion group had heard of parliamentary committees.

## Consensus Committee

The Consensus Committee – established in July 2013, with the task of proposing compromises to pass legislation – was familiar to some participants. While acknowledging that it plays an important role in facilitating legislation, these participants blamed the committee for not disclosing its results to the public. Participants who had not previously heard of the Consensus Committee had more positive impressions.

*"I think it is fairly good like this, because in this way we can find the solution." (Male, 61, train conductor, Tunis)*

*"I think this is quite positive, because it will help people to find peaceful deals." (Female, 24, photographer, Nabeul)*

*"If it is related to the citizens, why does this committee not take into account the point of view of the citizen, rather than deciding on our behalf?" (Female, 23, intern, Nabeul)*

Some participants remarked that the Consensus Committee would be more credible if it could ensure that all decisions are taken by citizens and reviewed by expert authorities.

*"Why not set up a web platform, for instance, to involve citizens in the operating process of decision-making by the consensus committee. In this way, we can disclose the points of contention among the MPs and listen to the alternative solutions being proposed. Also, we need experts in this committee: engineers, doctors, technicians... to guarantee that the citizens are genuinely involved in the decision-making and that the decisions are monitored by experts." (Male, 30, physiotherapist, Nabeul)*

The most skeptical participants viewed this committee as yet another forum for horse-trading.

*"It operates with the logic of quid pro quo." (Female, 35, unemployed, Tozeur)*

## Focus Group Analytical Report

### **Behavior of MPs**

Across all focus groups, participants strongly disapproved of the behavior of MPs in the Parliament. They consistently described MPs' behavior as unbecoming and disrespectful of the people whom they are charged to represent. Among other problems, participants worried that the use of insults, disrespect, absenteeism, and quarrelling by MPs give Tunisia a bad image on the world stage.

*"Only a few MPs are effective and professional, the others are not doing their work properly, especially in the plenary where they are doing nothing but quarrel and fight all the time." (Male, 55, retired, Jendouba)*

*"The most important thing for me is they talk, they are very arrogant and impolite, I do not want to be on their side." (Female, 25, unemployed, Nabeul)*

*"... when we see the MPs asleep in the Parliament, we think it is a disgrace for Tunisia, and sometimes I wish that people would not even look at them." (Female, 35, secretary, Tozeur)*

*"There are some conflicts, yet one should understand the rules of communication. They have the right to disagree, but they should never fight." (Male, 29, personal trainer, Nabeul)*

*"I don't watch them... because I don't want to watch this kind of behavior. When we look at them, we simply think that we are watching a bunch of ignorant guys" (Female, 35, unemployed, Tunis)*

*"They are most known for when they are sleeping [in Parliament]." (Male, 62, civil servant, Tozeur)*

### **Decision-Making**

With regards to the decision-making process in Parliament, most participants considered it cumbersome and lacking transparency. They accused parliamentarians of obstructing any initiative that did not work in their personal interest or those of their political parties, for example delays in drafting the law on the new Constitutional Court.

*"When it comes to adopting the laws, it is the interest of the MPs, and not that of the citizens, that is taken into account." (Male, 53, retired, Jendouba)*

*"They have the power. He who has the biggest power, does not even need to understand the demands of the people." (Male, 34, employee, Tozeur)*

Participants worried that many parliamentarians are not well-informed enough to make decisions on complex issues such as healthcare or education.

*"If the topic is related to medicine, we have to consult health experts and involve the Ministry of Health." (Male, 29, personal trainer, Nabeul)*

## Focus Group Analytical Report

## Parliamentary Caucuses

When asked to give their personal evaluation of the parliamentary caucuses (party blocs and coalitions), almost all participants named Nida Tounes and Ennahdha as the two dominant blocs in Parliament. Few participants believed the remaining blocs have much influence, especially in decision-making. Here again, participants bemoaned the tendency of political tourism, in which MPs are seen to be constantly switching parties, thus leading to the emergence of new parliamentary coalitions. Participants noted that regularly re-shuffling the parliamentary caucuses makes it harder to keep track of what is going on, including where MPs stand on political issues.

*“Everywhere in the world there are political parties and their platforms. In Tunisia, MPs are changing parties all the time, and this is causing imbalances within the Parliament.” (Male, 62, retired, Jendouba)*

## Communication tools

Participants used the following tools to understand and keep informed about the functioning of Parliament and individual parliamentarians.

**Social media (notably YouTube and Facebook)** are the most important resource for the majority of participants, especially younger participants. All social media users considered them very powerful and efficient tools for learning about the latest developments in Tunisia. Social media users remarked that sites like Facebook and YouTube have an advantage over broadcast media like television, because they are constantly updated and constantly available; even if someone missed a news program on TV, for example, they could still read about the news anytime they wished on Facebook, or watch the same news program later on YouTube.

*“[for news about Parliament] I only consult Facebook.” (Male, 42, day laborer, Jendouba)*

*“If something happens, you can hear about it immediately on Facebook and on the social media.” (Female, 22, student, Nabeul)*

Another key advantage of social media is that it allows users to interact with the rest of the community.

*“TV is the most commonplace medium, but if we go on Facebook, we can get information from different people, but not directly from the Parliament.” (Male, 24, unemployed, Nabeul)*

Although most were avid social media users, only a few participants said they had visited the official Facebook page of the Parliament.

**Television** is another key news source for participants. Although it does not allow opportunities for engagement like they could have on social media, participants appreciated the summaries of Parliamentary debates provided by television news. These news segments were viewed favorably for helping participants understand what was discussed in Parliament, in a clear and concise manner.

*"I try to understand what happened by watching TV. " (Female, 52, inspector, Tozeur)*

**Radio, print media** and **word-of-mouth** were named as ancillary sources of news and information. **Focus Group Analytical Report** No-one mentioned these media as primary sources of information for the news, but some did recall first learning about significant developments on the radio, or by word of mouth (in this case male participants were more likely to list personal acquaintances as a source of information).

*"I have heard about them (the elections of October – November 2019), from people in the cafés. They also talked about some relevant issues. " (Male, 49, business manager, Tunis)*

*"In the cafés, that is where people talk." (Male, 27, commercial agent, Tunis)*

Thinking about how they, as normal citizens, seek out information, almost all participants said they rely solely on the media. Most said they were satisfied enough with the information they get through the media that they would not feel a need for additional research. Some participants reported contacting their MPs directly, mostly to request private assistance or to communicate their stance on issues being debated in Parliament.

*"They have not consulted us, so why should we become active citizens? " (Female, 47, homemaker, Jendouba)*

*"I have other concerns in my daily life that I have to deal with, that is why I don't care about Parliament" (Female, 23, intern, Tunis)*

*"I was wounded by a policeman during the demonstrations, but that was after the revolution. My lawyer suggested to make an appointment with a member of the Parliament. I did try to contact them, but it was to no avail." (Male, 24, upholsterer, Tunis)*

## **Next Parliament**

Looking ahead to the next Parliament, participants' expectations were split in two: some who were pessimistic and did not expect much to change, and some who believed that the next Parliament should improve over the current one.

The pessimistic group was doubtful that a new Parliament will be willing or able to change the situation of Tunisian citizens. Many said that once the new MPs are seated, they will soon forget about the problems of their constituencies and will only focus on serving their own interests.

Participants who believe the next Parliament will do a better job cited the growth of the public knowledge and experience over the past five years. Believing that Tunisian citizens are better informed and understand better how to hold their elected officials accountable, this group expected voters to make more informed choices and stay more engaged with politics after the elections. Others saw that political parties are keen to do a better job to maintain people's confidence, and

will work together more to meet the demands of the public.

"The MPs of the new Parliament should better qualified and I am quite optimistic about that. "

**(Male, 55, civil servant, Tunis)**

### Focus Group Analytical Report

"If the Parliament remains unchanged and with the same structure, where the parties will be the most powerful, that will be bad. But if we manage to elect more independent MPs, not necessarily affiliated to political parties, the results will be better. " **(Female, 45, educational advisor, Tozeur)**

"Everybody is learning on a daily basis, citizens and politicians alike... Currently, we have a lot of information, and the next [Parliament] will be better." **(Male, 42, corporate executive, Nabeul)**

Invited to pick the priority issues for the incoming Parliament, participants named the following:

- Inflation: rising prices and the devaluation of the Tunisian dinar
- Healthcare
- Security
- Investments and job creation
- Education
- Secure national resources
- Infrastructure improvement
- Agricultural development
- Development of interior region
- Public transportation
- Tourism

Concerning the working methods of the incoming Parliament, participants listed the following expectations:

- Respect and implementation of the laws
- Enforcement of the obligation to attend plenary sessions, including punishments for absenteeism or disregard for the rules of order
- "Genuine " and " decisive " action to address corruption in the awarding of oil contracts, in the health sector, and to open investigations into the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi
- Pass a clear action plan for national development
- Focus on agriculture

Participants agreed that if they saw the Parliament working more constructively and following protocols, it would increase their trust in the Parliament's work. To further increase citizens' confidence in the Parliament, participants also suggested the following:

- Direct communication with citizens to understand their needs



- Disclose personal and partisan interests, and distance themselves from them during decision-making
- Involve citizens directly in decision-making

Focus Group Analytical Report Several participants noted the importance of frequent communication between parliamentarians and their constituents, to improve citizen understanding and afford them an opportunity to question parliamentarians and offer suggestions on issues of concern to them.

*“They have to meet with us and give us updates. They have to be transparent concerning their background and they have to engage us as active participants. They must not forget about us.”*  
**(Female, 55, homemaker, Tunis)**

Participants also noted the importance of transparency, recalling the effort of some parliamentarians to share their day-to-day movements on social media (such as where they stay when travelling, who they met with, sharing their impressions of the day's debates, etc.). Participants, including a majority of youth, viewed this type of communication positively, saying it allowed them to reassure themselves of the credibility of their representatives.

*“All [MPs] should be like Yassine Ayari. He is active, he knows how to work, he gives feedback, his questions for the ministers are clear and direct. When he travels to Europe, he stays with friends or in houses, while the other MPs are in five-star hotels.”* **(Male, 35, teacher, Nabeul)**

Most participants said they would be willing to engage more with the new Parliament, provided they could see the new deputies making improvements:

*“If they can adapt and do their work well, I will change too.”* **(Male, 30, physiotherapist, Nabeul)**

*“If there is something new with the Parliament, we will be with them.”* **(Male, 47, taxi driver, Tunis)**

Some others stated that they plan to be more engaged whether or not Parliament changes and mentioned they would encourage their children to engage more as well.

*“Our behavior must change, and we have to be more active for the country, we have to express ourselves and get in direct contact with the deputies.”* **(Female, 35, secretary, Tozeur)**

*“There is a door at the People's Representatives' Assembly, called the visitors' entrance, I will be more active, and I will inculcate a different mentality in my children.”* **(Female, 55, homemaker, Tunis)**

## Legislative and Presidential Elections

Participants discussed their intention to vote, their impressions of the elections' credibility, and their expectations for the legislative and presidential elections. Participants also provided descriptions of their ideal candidate for Parliament and for President, respectively. Most participants had not received much information about election administration issues, such as the electoral commission or international and national observers. Overall, youth were more skeptical of the electoral process, and less likely to vote.

### Elections and intent to vote

Nearly all participants were aware that legislative and presidential elections will take place in the next few months. However, there was some confusion over the exact date of elections. Of those who did know the election date, most said they had learned of it after some groups had protested the ISIE's initial selection of November 10, 2019, which coincides with the Mouled holiday. Others said they had heard the election date announced on TV or radio. Some participants did not know the precise date of the elections but assumed they would occur in October and November based on the last parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014.

Most participants said they intend to vote, considering it both a right and a civic duty. Some described the motivation to vote as a way to change Tunisia's current situation.

"It's both a right and a duty for me to vote, and also I count on it to have new leaders who will improve the current state of the country." **(Female, 61, seamstress, Tunis)**

"Even though I am very disappointed with the current Parliament, I have hope for the next one and I must vote." **(Male, 39, decorator, Tunis)**

### Elections' credibility

The groups shared mixed perceptions about the next elections' fairness and credibility.

Those who believed that forthcoming elections will be credible and transparent said that the Tunisian citizen is better informed and more mature today, and will be resistant to manipulation and fraud.

"I think that the Tunisian people are fully aware of the electoral process, so there will be no problems this time." **(Male, 41, cook, Tunis)**

Others held that the elections will be neither credible nor transparent, seeing danger and threats in recent events such as the closure, of Nessma TV.

"There is an anecdote on Facebook which says: when the guard of the cemetery hears a voice, he says to the dead calm down, it isn't time for the elections yet." **(Female, 55, housewife, Tozeur)**

"I said the elections will not be fair because I have heard that they are using the IDs of dead persons." **(Male, 24, unemployed, Nabeul)**

**Focus Group Analytical Report**  
Almost all participants believed that there will be conflict between the political parties during the electoral campaign, including:

- Mutual recriminations and accusations of wrongdoing
- Violence
- Political assassinations
- Manipulation of public opinion and spreading rumors
- Vote-buying and disputing election results

Participants chose the Army as the first guarantor of the elections, followed by the National Guard and civil society. Only a few participants mentioned the ISIE unprompted, and a few also mentioned election observers, both national and international.

## Legislative elections

### *Profile of an Ideal MP*

Participants were asked to list the characteristics of their ideal member of parliament. First and foremost, participants described moral values such as **sincerity, honesty, and patriotism**. Personal qualities were equally important; common traits included **audacity, firmness, effectiveness, character, and leadership**. Participants also stressed the importance of **public service** and **speaking ability**.

"Someone who is honest and who works for the benefit of his region." **(Female, 61, seamstress, Tozeur)**

"They have to be honest, not corrupted." **(Male, 37, civil servant, Nabeul)**

"If he is a trustworthy man, I will vote for him." **(Male, 61, train conductor, Tunis)**

"[an ideal MP] attends the sessions, is trustworthy and honest, who would pay visits to the local area he represents, get in touch with people and understand the queries of the people he represents. This person must help people and listen to them." **(Female, 54, inspector, Jendouba)**

Participants emphasized the need to be **close to the citizens** and to be a **good listener**. This was often described as a person who is comfortable with fieldwork.

"I want them to resort to face-to-face communication" **(Female, 24, student, Nabeul)**

"They should explain and clarify their programs and their plans of action by holding direct meetings with the citizens." **(Male, 53, retired, Jendouba)**

"Honestly, they will not be able to deal with every single problem, but it is important to notice that they are doing their best to make a difference." **(Male, 45, agent, Tozeur)**

Some participants mentioned additional qualities, including:

- Disciplined and respectful
- Independent; not affiliated with any political party
- Visionary with a clear political and socio-economic project
- Experienced, with thorough knowledge of the laws and policies

Participants across all age groups expressed a strong wish for a **more youthful Parliament**, describing an ideal candidate as no more than 50 years old, or between 35 and 50 years old.

With regards to gender, some participants indicated that they would prefer men, whereas some others wished to have greater representation of women. However, most participants did not express any gender preference.

"Samia Abbou is better than one hundred men. Abir Moussi is equally good." **(Male, 67, retired, Tozeur)**

"Gender is not truly important." **(Female, 40, professor, Jendouba)**

"Even if I support Ennahdha party, and we opt for a religious spirit, I can see that women candidates have more powerful tools than men to convince the voters." **(Male, 41, cook, Tunis)**

"Generally speaking, I think that men have strong characters, they can put up with threats, and they are able to give more sacrifices." **(Female, 32, unemployed, Tozeur)**

### *Learning about Candidates*

Participants preferred interactive communication with candidates to receive information about their proposals and platforms. Direct interaction was preferred over written publications like brochures, mostly because participants wanted the chance to question candidates and speak with them directly. Participants expressed interest in attending site visits by candidates, for instance at culture centers, youth clubs, and other public spaces.

Most participants did not express any interest in door-to-door visits.

While campaigning in person was viewed as most desirable, participants agreed that candidates should also have a strong media presence, such as posters, and appearances on TV, radio, and social media (notably Facebook).

Youth participants expressed a stronger desire for unconventional and innovative means of communication, particularly using social media.

While some participants had read previously-distributed written programs, none found these communications satisfactory. Participants explained that written platforms were

too vague, abstract, and did not reflect their lived reality.

### *Electoral priorities*

In order to better understand the priorities of the citizens, the participants in each focus group ~~Focus Group Analytical Report~~ of the candidate and to spell out their ideas for an electoral program. The top priorities mentioned by the participants were:

- Growing national economy
- Keeping inflation under control
- Creating more job opportunities and reducing unemployment
- Security
- Reforming the education sector
- Reforming the health sector

Other priorities included:

- The rule of law
- Fighting corruption
- Promoting domestic and foreign investment
- Monitoring the impartiality of media
- Reforming the public procurement policies
- Reforming the public administration
- Aid for the poor and underprivileged
- Housing
- Health insurance and social security
- Enjoining public morality within all institutions

Some other priorities were specific to regions, as follows:

Tunis	Nabeul	Jendouba	Tozeur
- Sanitation	- Infrastructure (e.g. asphaltting of roads, rainwater Maleagement)	- Fresh water supply and sanitation services in rural areas - Construction and maintenance of rural roads - Upgrading tourist facilities	- Upgrading of the tourist sector

## **Presidential elections**

### *Profile of an Ideal President*

As they had done with parliamentarians, participants referred first to personal qualities when describing their ideal president. Top qualities included **powerful**, **sovereign**, **patriotic**, and **charismatic**.

All groups agreed the next president should be a **man of the people**, i.e. in touch with ordinary citizens and fully aware of their daily concerns. Participants also felt the president should have an ability for **diplomacy**.

Focus Group Analytical Report  
Some participants cited the example of former president Ben Ali.

*"What the country needs is a powerful and sovereign president, like Ben Ali, in the early years of his ruling, from his coming to power until 1995." (Male, 55, entrepreneur, Nabeul)*

Other participants referred to the former president Habib Bourguiba as an example of a leader who understands normal people.

*"All Tunisians love the former president Habib Bourguiba! Why? Because he used to be close to the people all the time. We are looking for a similar president nowadays." (Female, 66, housewife, Tozeur)*

A number of participants mentioned that the president should be **independent** and not affiliated to any political party, in order to guarantee his impartiality.

*"We are looking for a president who would represent all Tunisians. Therefore, he should not be affiliated to any political party!" (Male, 73, retired, Jendouba)*

Additional qualities of an ideal president included:

- Honesty, trustworthiness and transparency
- Visionary with political experience
- Conscientious
- Fair
- Altruistic
- Not authoritarian
- Intelligent

Again, as with parliamentarians, participants preferred a **more youthful** President. All focus groups said the next President should be from 40-60 years old.

In order for the president to win the trust of the citizens, the participants have stated he should:

- Be self-confident
- Be able to improve Tunisia's image abroad
- Propose down-to-earth and achievable political projects
- Have a record of professional success
- Disclose his properties
- Advocate a sincere and realistic discourse
- Perform well in live TV debates with other presidential candidates

*Communication between the president and the citizens*

In order to have a better idea about the presidential candidates and their political programs, the participants preferred to have direct contact with the candidates (i.e. visits to different regions), although appearances in national media were also highly rated.

Focus Group Analytical Report: *"It's not easy to be analytical with the people; one must meet with the people."* **(Female, 25, teacher, Tunis)**

*"We should have direct meetings with the local populations."* **(Male, 49, worker, Nabeul)**

*"He should use TV stations and show that he is capable of talking to people, responding to people's queries, and notably when he receives direct questions from them."* **(Male, 42, civil servant, Nabeul)**

*"We should notice that he active and accept to meet people, that this is the only way to accept him."* **(Female, 66, housewife, Tozeur)**

## ISIE and electoral observers

### The Independent Higher Authority for Elections (ISIE)

The majority of participants were familiar with the ISIE, and viewed it as competent to handle its mission registering the voters. Many participants noted that the ISIE's performance has improved, compared to previous elections.

*"I think that the authority is operating correctly and that its members are everywhere, there have been some improvements, and I have heard they have managed to register a total number of 1.4 million voters in just six days."* **(Male, 34, baggage handler, Tunis)**

Some participants found the ISIE's citizen outreach lacking, especially its voter registration drive and explanations of the procedures to the elderly and the illiterate.

*"They do not explain to people the importance of the electoral process. A girl, who works with them, asked if I was registered or not, when I said no, she asked for my ID and registered me without any giving me any explanation."* **(Female, 21, student, Tunis)**

### Election observers

When asked about election observations, most participants recalled national observers, and described their role as paramount in guaranteeing a climate of trust, security and credibility for the smooth running of the elections. Some participants apparently misunderstood the role of observers, confusing them with political parties (domestic election observers in Tunisia are non-partisan).

*"They must be neutral and not affiliated to any political party."* **(Male, 55, retired, Jendouba)**

Participants mentioned several organizations conducting elections observation, including: Mourakiboun, ATIDE, Ana Yakidh and Marsad Chahed.

## **International observers**

The perception of the role of the international observers was more ambiguous: some participants welcomed their presence to increase trust in the electoral process and to certify the results of the elections. Participants also hope that international observers could provide recommendations aimed at reinforcing the spirit of democracy in Tunisia.

*"We are just beginners in the field of democracy, so I think that the role of these observers is important to help us organize fair and transparent elections." (Male, 24, cook, Tunis)*

Other participants were suspicious of international observers, describing them as having no valuable role.

*"I consider them spies, they claim to monitor the elections, but what they are doing indeed, is the transfer news to their respective countries: who are going to win the elections so that they can cooperate with later on." (Female, 21, student, Tunis)*



## Political parties

### Perceptions of National Parties

Thinking about the multi-party system in Tunisia as a whole, some participants blamed it for political gridlock, while others praised it for facilitating competition and affording more options for voters.

Participants who dislike the current party system cited several factors: they believed **the current system creates confusion** and **permits political tourism**, making it difficult for citizens to understand the party landscape. A few participants even wished for laws that would further limit the number of political parties, for example a higher threshold for membership in order to be officially recognized.

*"We have to enact a law whereby we can limit the plethora of political parties by indicating the minimum number of members to be affiliated to any given political party to be licensed. Furthermore, we have to monitor people's behavior to prevent them from registering in two political parties at the same time." (Male, 69, retired, Jendouba)*

*"Ahmed Matar has composed a poem which describes beautifully the current situation: the biggest problems in our country are the political parties, poverty, and divorce. We have ten parties and a half party in every alley. All parties try to avoid dissensions. All of them split up in two hours, and then split again and again all so they can reconcile. The embers crumble and cold stays, until there are only ashes." (Male, 55, inspector, Jendouba)*

Participants who like the current system were glad to have multiple parties providing diverse political perspectives. They believed that more parties mean more room for differing opinions and more choices, both fundamental aspects of democracy. This group were more likely to appreciate competition among political parties as beneficial for all citizens.

### New Parties

Most participants were skeptical that new political parties could bring anything new to the country, compared to the current ones. This impression was based on a broad distrust of any political party, but also on the basis that new parties were simply building over the "remnants" of failed older parties.

*"I can only see negative changes. They only take interest in the changes that benefit them." (Male, 34, baggage handler, Tunis)*

*"There too many parties and none of them is effective." (Female, 55, teacher, Jendouba)*

*"It's the law of the jungle, only the strong survive. The new parties are emerging daily, they are too Many, and this leads to political instability." (Male, 34, employee, Tozeur)*

*"To my mind, the new political parties are ridiculous, and they are nothing more than copies of the former ones." (Female, 45, educational advisor, Tozeur)*

Other participants were doubtful that any new parties would not be able to break the

grip of the two dominant parties in Tunisia.

*"I personally hope that they will give them a chance, because the big parties are monopolizing the scene and they do not want the new parties to play any political role." (Male, 27, personal Focus Group Analytical Report **trainer, Tunis**)*

Still, some participants were optimistic that the situation of the country could improve with the input of new political parties, but with the proviso that they serve public interests and Maleage to build a constituency.

*"I am quite hopeful and optimistic." (Female, 27, student, Tunis)*

*"I would like to add one more point... if they feel more comfortable and more productive in another party, why not changing?" (Male, 41, cook, Tunis)*

*"There are definitely new ideas and just for that, I remain optimistic." (Female, 36, manager, Tozeur)*

### **Citizen engagement**

In all groups, a minority agreed with the assertion that political parties are dealing with priority questions for ordinary citizens. All who espoused this view agreed that any **opportunity for reform is impeded** by the other political parties.

*"There are Many (political parties). For instance, we are facing daily problems such as poverty and education, and there quite a few parties which take genuine interest in these questions." (Female, 25, teacher, Tunis)*

The rest of the participants said that parties only serve their own interests.

*"People in Tunisia think that with more political parties we can be more efficient, yet, it is totally different because each party is working for its own agenda and not the agenda of the country." (Female, 50, instructor, Nabeul)*

Almost all participants agreed that **political parties do not involve constituents** in the development of political programs and request their services only during campaigns.

*"Their meetings are always held in hotels, and this why no one can attend." (Female, 40, professor, Jendouba)*

*"There is no participation because nowadays the political parties pay money for the citizens to guarantee their ballots." (Male, 49, worker, Nabeul)*

Participants suggested the following to feel more involved in the preparation of political program:

- Establish coordination committees within each region to be entrusted with the identification of the needs and problems of the local residents (several

participants noted that such a system would be similar to that of the former regime of Ben Ali).

- To carry out pre-scheduled visits to all regions and organize discussion groups
- Focus Group Analytical Report**  
with focus on results to identify priority issues and propose elements to include in campaign platforms.

### **Opposition parties**

Groups were divided on the performance of opposition parties.

Some participants noted that they appreciate the **alternate perspective** they get from opposition parties on government activities. For these individuals, the opposition plays a key role as a **check on the majority**.

*"Whether we like it or not, they have a positive side because they do not allow the government actors to rule as they wish. They have an important role to play to make sure that things are clear for the citizens." (Male, 30, physiotherapist, Nabeul)*

However, the apparent majority of participants viewed the opposition's role as purely destructive and not constructive, noting that the **opposition will obstruct but does not propose solutions**. Some also believe the opposition only protested laws that affected their parochial interests, without consideration for the general welfare of the public. For most participants, the opposition has not lived up to its own expectations.

*"They do not do their duty because they had given too Many promises that they have never kept." (Male, 55, civil servant, Tunis)*

### **Political parties at the regional level**

Participants did not identify any significant differences between parties at the regional and national levels. They generally believed that regional parties mirror their national leadership, while some remarked that the national party leaders dominate at the expense of local interests.

*"The political landscape, at the regional level, is reminiscent of the national one. When we observe the members of the municipality in Bardo, Nabeul and Soukra, who have resigned because they could not serve their own agenda, and other MPs who migrate from one party to another for identical reasons, we cannot say anything to the contrary!" (Female, 55, housewife, Tunis)*

In Nabeul and Tozeur, some participants said their local government is performing better than the national, noting that the local political leaders are young and have been working to improve the situation in their respective regions.

Participants said that new political parties are hardly present in the regional political landscape.

## Municipal councils

Discussion groups were asked to evaluate the performance of their municipal councils, one year since they were elected.

### Focus Group Analytical Report

Most participants in all regions believed that their municipal councils were underperforming. Some cited a lack of finances, poor facilities, and lack of human resources as reasons. A few participants believed their municipal councilors were incompetent and uninterested in serving the public.

*"The municipality is in charge of so many projects that used to be entrusted to the governorate, and therefore they could not be completed because it is so much time consuming." (Male, 29, personal trainer, Nabeul)*

While no region stood out as having higher satisfaction with municipal councils, at least some participants in all regions noted improvements in the areas where they live. Participants often said their local municipality is hard-working and conscientious, and has fully involved local residents in their programs.

*"There are many meetings that are convened at the town hall and people receive a lot of information about the current projects, and notably the ones aimed at upgrading living standards." (Male, 69, retired, Jendouba)*

*"I took part in meetings held at the municipality premises in my area. This experience was wonderful. Among the actions that we have undertaken, I can mention the program to organize sanitation workers and use schedules that indicate the accurate day and time of the garbage collection. Similarly, we have assigned some controllers to monitor the behavior of the citizens and to warn them against disposing of garbage outside the time schedule assigned for that." (Male, 35, factory worker, Tunis)*

When asked to name activities of their municipal councils, participants mentioned:

- Street-cleaning
- Organization of garbage-collection campaigns
- Improving sanitation in general
- Construction and repair of roads
- Regulation of markets and elimination of illegal street vendors

### **Participatory democracy**

Participatory democracy is one of the most important stages in local governance in Tunisia. It consists of reinforcing the active participation of the citizens in local activities, and giving them a chance to take part in decision-making and have an impact on local affairs.

Approximately half of all participants were aware of the concept of participatory democracy, though youth groups were generally less likely to have heard of it. A smaller group of participants had actually been active in participatory democracy initiatives.

Majorities in most groups expressed interest in participatory democracy and said they would engage in local activities if they learned of them in time to attend.

Those who had been involved in local initiatives reported mixed results. However, it must be ~~Focus Group Analytical Report~~ noted that a few indications of political activity were observed in this portion of the discussion; participants were generally more satisfied with their experiences in participatory democracy than with national politics, party activism, or the Parliament.

*"They only focus on some pure formalities like the participation of women, for instance, the number of attendees etc... Therefore, I took the floor to raise a comment that their agenda does not represent our priorities at all. " (Male, 38, unemployed, Jendouba)*

*"My experience was quite beneficial, because there has always been a follow-up for each program being launched. " (Male, 41, cook, Tunis)*

*"It is quite interesting to know everything they are talking about, and then to see them implement these decisions on the ground! " (Female, 54, inspector, Jendouba)*

*"In my municipality of Hamma, these meetings are highly beneficial and people attend in big numbers. We talk about our needs and we do ask for certain things, the municipality does take our queries into account and does take genuine interest in our demands. " (Female, 55, homemaker, Tozeur)*

For those who were aware of participatory democracy but had not been active, some said they were too busy, while one participant believed her opinion would not be valued.

*"I have heard about these meetings, but I am not interested simply because I know that they would never take my opinion into account." (Female, 24, photographer, Nabeul)*

A few participants expressed a desire to engage in participatory democracy, but said they did not know how to do so.

## ANNEX A: Participant Demographics

- **A total of 120 participants** from Tunis, Nabeul, Jendouba, Tozeur.
- Focus Group Analytical Report
- **10 participants** per focus group
  - **Diversity of** ages, professions and neighborhood in each group

## Focus Group Analytical Report

### **ANNEX B: STUDY METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT**

**Objective.** This series of focus group discussions was held by NDI from April through May 2019. Since March 2011, NDI has been conducting qualitative research in Tunisia on a regular basis, in order to provide political and civic leaders with objective data on citizens' attitudes. This study aimed to identify citizens' evaluations of the Parliament's performance, perceptions of the new Parliament and of political parties, citizen expectations for the next elections, and citizen priorities at the regional and national levels.

Participants have taken part in 12 group discussions, held between April 25 and May 2, discussing the following topics:

- The direction of the country and priorities that affect citizens' daily lives;
- The performance of parliament, confidence in parliament and the extent to which it is seen as fulfilling its key roles;
- How citizens obtain information on the work of parliament, including use of the parliament's website and Facebook page;
- Reactions to possible initiatives Parliament could consider for improving outreach and communication with citizens (e.g. listening tours);
- Citizens' expectations for the next Parliament;
- Citizens' intention to vote in the 2019 legislative and presidential elections
- Citizens' impressions of what makes an ideal candidate for Parliament;
- How Parliament can build greater public confidence, improve communication with the public, and respond more effectively to citizens' needs;
- Citizens' impressions of what makes an ideal candidate for President;
- Possible actions candidates can take to win public confidence, improve communication, and speak to citizens' priorities;
- Awareness and perceptions of the presence and performance of ISIE and of election observation organizations;
- Awareness and expectations of upcoming elections, including the credibility of results; and
- Citizens' evaluation of political parties at the national and regional levels.

The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting—a marketing and public opinion research firm based in Tunisia—to organize the study in four Tunisian governorates.

**Focus Group Research:** Focus groups are open-ended group interviews directed by a

moderator and following pre-set guidelines. The purpose of focus group research is to understand attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of respondents who are recruited for the exercise. Focus groups are particularly useful in gaining a deeper appreciation of the motivations, feelings and values behind respondents' reactions. In addition, the group format enables respondents to participate in an exchange of ideas—thus providing a more in-depth understanding of why opinions are held—that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys.

Focus group discussions are comprised of a small number of respondents, typically eight to 12 per group. Depending on the situation, however, groups may be slightly smaller or larger. For example, a women's group in a more isolated area may benefit from a larger guest list because it is likely that one or more of the respondents will refuse to speak at length, even if pressed.

Focus group findings are only a snapshot of opinions at the moment the research is undertaken. The conclusions of this report therefore only represent opinions held when research was conducted in late April and early May 2019. Qualitative research seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively projectable measures. Due to the sample size, the special recruitment methods used, and the study objectives themselves, it is understood that the work under discussion is exploratory in nature. The findings are not, nor were they intended to be, statistically projectable to a larger population. This kind of projection is strictly the prerogative of quantitative research.

**Method:** Before conducting the research, NDI developed a moderation guide that reflected the themes and questions they have come to identify as priorities for their various partners and clients in their day to day work in Tunisia. A test focus group was held on April 23, and based on this session, the draft moderation guide was modified to improve discussion flow and to ensure that the topics could be explored within a two-hour session.

From April 25 to May 2, NDI held 12 focus groups with a total of 120 respondents in four cities across Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Nabeul, Jendouba, and Tozeur. To capture the perspectives of a broad cross-section of Tunisian society, NDI divided respondents at each location into three distinct demographic groups:

- 1) Mixed gender youth (ages 21–34);
- 2) Women 35 years old and older; and,
- 3) Men 35 years old and older.

Each group comprised up to 10 respondents. The final gender breakdown was 51 percent men and 49 percent women. Respondents were selected and pre-screened to ensure gender parity and a diverse representation of neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and professions. To qualify for the focus groups, respondents also needed to be eligible to vote in the 2019 legislative and presidential



elections. Additional details on the demographic profile of focus group respondents can be found in the [Focus Group Analytical Report](#).

**Staffing and Logistics:** The Institute commissioned ELKA Consulting to organize the study in four regions across the country. A Tunisian citizen trained in focus group moderation techniques by NDI and ELKA served as the moderator for all focus groups in the series. All groups were conducted in the Tunisian dialect of Arabic.

**Group Locations:** The 12 focus groups outlined in this report were conducted in four locations throughout Tunisia: Greater Tunis, Nabeul, Jendouba, and Tozeur (see the map in this section). Locations selected for the study were urban or semi-urban areas. Target cities were selected based on their population size, economic weight, geographical location and voting patterns in the 2018 municipal elections.

- **Greater Tunis** was selected because it encompasses the capital, the biggest city in Tunisia, and is the center of commerce and public administration.
- **Nabeul** is a city located in the northeast, surrounded by the Mediterranean sea on two sides (south and east). The region is equally renowned for the beauty of its landscape, its agricultural wealth and its developed tourist and industrial sectors.
- **Jendouba** is located at the furthest northwestern part of Tunisia. It provides the national economy with a large proportion of strategic food commodities and offers considerable tourist assets focused on a varied archeological heritage and a wide range of international cultural festivals, such as the jazz festival of Tabarka.
- **Tozeur** is a small city in the Djerid region in the southwest of Tunisia, near to the Algerian border. This small city is also located at the gateway of the desert and is a major point of departure for desert tourism.

In all locations, appropriate venues for focus group discussions were identified to ensure respondent privacy and sufficient space for indirect observation by NDI staff.

**Outside influence:** Every effort was made to ensure there was no undue influence exerted on the respondents. Focus group discussion guides were not shared with local authorities prior to the sessions. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from overall findings, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.